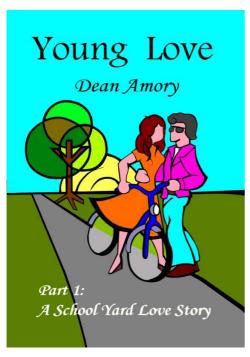


ROMANCE NOVEL REVIEW: YOUNG LOVE - DEAN AMORY

YOUNG LOVE: THE STORY OF A BOY MOVING TOWARD ADULTHOOD

Dean Amory's endearing romance novels "A Schoolyard Love Story" and "First Love's Shadow" about a working class boy's transition to adulthood, deliver a lovingly personal observation of an adolescent at a crossroads and effortlessly capture the shape of a life poised between childhood and adult life.



With Dean Amory following his hero, Sean, through the two last years of high school and the ensuing transition to labour and engagement, the Young Love stories transform one teenager's particular story into a moving portrait of a generation. The resulting moving portrait of a teenager with bittersweet glimpses of a young life in transition owes little to polished TV realities or characters of cheap romance novels in which paranormal gifts, the sudden death of unknown rich uncles or the appearance of werewolves and zombies turns the description of teenagers' life into a mockery of reality. Instead, "Young Love" describes life as it really is and knowingly dismantles the cheery fantasies of teenage life depicted in mainstream entertainment.

We learn a great deal about Sean while we accompany him as he attends school, hangs out with friends or wanders around town on his own, works during summer holidays, etc... The story

records the rhythms of the young man's life and lets the drama grow from within his everyday experiences and thoughts.

At 17, Sean, is struggling to exchange a carefree but outgrown and unsatisfactory past by a simultaneously desired and feared unknown future. With the world seemingly closing and opening - and closing again - at the same time, and each new month bringing new decisions that have the potential to change the course of his entire life, he is living moments that are simultaneously universal and achingly personal.

Sean has arrived at that time in one's life where everything moves and slides and slips, where actions suddenly have consequences and where he starts to become who he'll be and knows he has an impact on the outcome. Everything is changing. He has finally reached the age at which he can explore and enjoy his freedom, but already he's mentally focused on how it will be to be married.

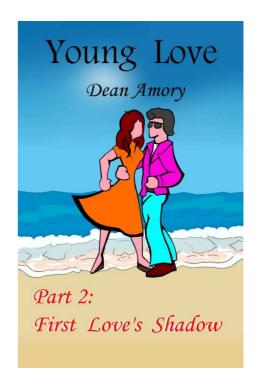
<u>Young Love</u> is a compassionate portrait of a working class boy perching over the border of his youth. He knows that, after graduating from high school, his life will change forever. There is a vast future in front of him, but it's one that is much more frightening than it is promising.

Although very much rooted in the seventies and in the culture of Flemish working class kids and the unique situation of this boy, the story hits notes of our universal struggle with change and uncertainty. In that way, the story is one that will melt your heart.

Dean's stories paint an indelibly pure portrayal of contemporary young love that has this wonderful capacity of turning us into a teen again, making us understand the teen mindset and how it is to constantly grapple with the duality of wanting to cling to safe ground even while setting sail filled with dreams of unknown horizons and hopes for a bright future.

In many ways, Sean's story is our story. The specifics are different, but we all go through that period of anticipation and anxiety when it comes to the future. What's ahead? He has no idea, and neither did we.

Dean Amory's greatest strengths come with his ability to capture the genuine rhythms of Sean's life. He gets past the typical narcissism of adolescence and, penetrating the facades and clichés, takes us back into its essence, revealing us the appropriate ambivalence with which Sean wrestles and plays with the friction between childhood escapist dreams and the looming responsibilities of adult life, and showing us the basic sadness that one experiences when losing innocence for ever and being dragged into adulthood.



Without belaboring any point or entrapping his subjects, Dean Amory suggests Sean's social options as recombinations of TV room, mall, bars and discotheques, friends' places and public school, painting a quiet tragedy, throughout which the native feeling of that's-just-the-way-it-is lethargy is rather convincing, with Sean's life foremost representing a tenderly wrought and free-floating treatment of adolescent angst and the story offering us a realistic yet somewhat hazy portrait of the pivotal transitional moment in life that adolescence is.

The future, in many ways, is set in Sean's mind. He has accepted that he has no valuable alternative for the mediocre plans his parents have set out for him and knows that the end of high school for him will also be the start of professional life. Yet, he hasn't yet accepted the fact that he accepted, and therefore lives on the verge of two shores, in a mental nowhere land where his dreams are crushed and disintegrate and his heart and soul are filled with pangs of disillusion, angst and bewilderment as he encounters the irrevocable onslaught of young adulthood with its new expectations and endless responsibilities, which come way too sudden and too soon.

His only real goal left is to find a girl who's willing to walk that road together with him. The problem is that at seventeen, the girls that he wants, even while at time professing undying love and devotion for him, all still have other dreams.